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## **R**ED CHINA'S COMMUNES

by

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## RED CHINA'S COMMUNES

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**C**OMMUNIST CHINA is in the midst of drastic social and economic changes that are revolutionizing the manner of life of great masses of its people. The Red regime, ruling a country of vast population and low living standards, has mobilized millions of men and women to do the work of thousands of machines. In effect, it is putting human capital to the stupendous task of transforming a primitive economy into that of an advanced industrial state capable of competing with the Soviet Union and with the United States.

The "people's commune" is the instrument that has been chosen to enable Red China to make a "great leap forward" in agricultural and industrial production. No two communes are necessarily alike, but each is supposed to be, now or eventually, a self-sufficient entity embracing from 10,000 to 50,000 persons organized on military lines. Members of communes are to be cared for from cradle to grave and, under Peking's original plans, were expected in return to give up virtually all personal possessions, accept extreme modification of age-old customs and institutions, and dedicate their lives and labor to a new China.

By autumn of last year, the more than 500 million peasants in mainland China were being rapidly reduced to the status of conscripts in a semi-slave army, required to work at whatever place and whatever task their Communist masters ordered. More than 99 per cent of the peasants already had "joined" communes, and government spokesmen confidently predicted huge increases in food, coal, and steel production.

Red China's willingness to resort to the most extraordinary measures to achieve great gains in national output was disturbing to the governments of underdeveloped countries in the free world which were trying to strengthen their economies by traditional methods. Success of the Chinese experiment would carry a threat of political reper-

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cussions in India and countries of Southeast Asia, whose peoples would tend to be impressed by the results and not count the human costs.

To countries of the Communist bloc, China's communes seemed to represent an advance toward pure communism far beyond anything heretofore attempted. Red China thus appeared to be challenging the ideological leadership of the Soviet Union in international communism. But within China itself the demands of the commune system, and the far-reaching dislocations which it entailed, led to widespread popular resistance in the cities as well as the countryside.

As a result, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, by a resolution adopted Dec. 10 and published a week later, slowed the pace of the march toward communal living. Plans to set up communes in the big cities were suspended "until the skeptics are convinced." More attention to the individual welfare of the peasants in rural communes was ordered. "Over-eager" comrades were warned by the resolution not to become "dizzy with success," for the ultimate goal of communism was not as near or as easily attainable as some seemed to think. A breathing spell was needed, the resolution said, so that the communes could be "tidied up, checked over, and consolidated." Red China, by this Marxist-type calculated retreat, reaffirmed its belief in the commune system and set out to strengthen it.

#### **BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE'S COMMUNES**

The 26,000 communes so far established vary in size and in the extent of communal features. Each group has been formed by amalgamating a number of agricultural cooperative associations—China's version of the collective farm—into a single unit. The first of the communes, set up experimentally in Honan Province in April 1958 as the "Sputnik People's Commune," was a merger of 27 cooperative associations. The average membership of the communes is about 5,000 households, or 20,000 persons.

Every phase of the life of people belonging to a commune is regulated. The commune director, who is usually the Communist Party chief in the area, supervises departments set up to control all agricultural, industrial, financial, labor, cultural, political, social, health, educational, police, and

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military activity within the boundaries of the commune. This unique organizational scheme is designed for maximum efficiency in exploiting the country's human and material resources.

The backbone of a commune is its vast labor force. All members except the very young and very old are organized in labor units—called regiments, battalions, companies, platoons, or squads. Members are expected to carry out orders like soldiers. To instill a feeling of urgency, regular army soldiers or trusted party workers are attached to each labor unit to give inspiration and leadership. All able-bodied laborers, men and women alike, receive military training. A labor platoon may be ordered to the fields one day and sent next day to dig coal or to work at one of the many “back-yard blast furnaces” dotting the Chinese countryside. Major commune projects require deployment of whole labor regiments to plow land, carry ore, dig channels—usually with primitive tools, sometimes after marching hundreds of miles.

From Peking's point of view, making the commune the “basic social unit” of China has great practical advantages. First, rolling into one the administrative and economic affairs of an area permits tighter party control; supervision and Marxist indoctrination of the peasants, on and off the job, is facilitated. Second, grouping peasants into labor units of flexible size makes it possible to undertake virtually any project, no matter how ambitious or how serious the shortage of modern tools. Third, by making every peasant a soldier, Peking can boast of hundreds of million men and women under arms; a wartime fervor is created and the task of maintaining discipline is eased. Fourth, the size of a typical commune—large enough for diversified projects but small enough for centralized management—makes possible unified planning and relative self-sufficiency.<sup>1</sup> Finally, nurseries, mess halls, and other facilities free women for work in the fields and add to the economic efficiency of the system.

### LIVING CONDITIONS FOR MEMBERS OF COMMUNES

Hard work is the order of the day in every commune. Dozens of articles in English-language newspapers and

<sup>1</sup> Directors of communes divide land into production units, fix a target quota for each unit, and work with Peking officials to fulfill over-all Chinese economic goals. Small industries have been established in many communes. Peking's eventual aim is to reduce sharp differences between rural and urban China.

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magazines, based on first-hand observation or on accounts by the Red Chinese radio or press, have described life in the communes. All agree that, originally, it was an immediate aim of China's "basic social unit" to destroy the family system. As one veteran American correspondent in Asia put it: "The commune movement has further ends, of course. But Peking realizes that it can achieve none of these until it has first destroyed the family, that last possible breeding ground of organized resistance to Communist rule."<sup>2</sup>

Virtually all of these accounts relayed information that had been gathered before the Central Committee applied the brakes. A major portion of the 15,000-word resolution adopted last December was devoted to preserving family relationships and in other ways modifying commune practices that robbed the individual of his identity and institutional ties. Whether or not some of the practices customary in the communes in their first flush of enthusiasm are still followed is not known. Workers were forced in the beginning to toil or drill from 14 to 17 hours a day, under sunlight and floodlight, and then were marched to communal lectures or communal recreation centers. The length of the work-day depended on the decision of party leaders. Commune members received a small wage, and bonuses were awarded for exceptionally hard work.<sup>3</sup> Women were allowed three days off a month, men two.

All private property and possessions except the clothes on one's back were placed in the hands of the commune and refashioned, when possible, to produce identical hand tools, identical clothes, or other goods. Houses were torn down and the materials used to build dormitories and mess halls; time for both sleeping and eating was strictly rationed. Men and women worked in separate labor units and lived in separate dormitories. Husbands and wives were allowed privacy for only an hour once every few weeks.

Children were taken from parents and placed in nurseries, boarding schools, or labor units. The elderly were isolated in "Happiness Homes" to till vegetables, weave

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Rich, "Mac's 'Big Family'," *New Republic*, Jan. 5, 1959, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> The *Free China Review*, Nationalist Chinese publication, said in its January 1959 issue: "Under the cooperatives, members received from 50 to 70 per cent of the fruit of their labor. Now the communes distribute only 30 to 40 per cent of its income to members, while the major part goes to the Communist regime for heavy industrialization."

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baskets, or feed chickens. Through loudspeakers and lectures, commune members were bombarded with anti-American propaganda, statistics on production gains, and praise of the values of communal living.

### MODIFICATION OF AUSTERE INITIAL REGULATIONS

The December resolution of the Central Committee applauded the work of commune leaders but set forth some guidelines. It said people in communes should have not less than eight hours of sleep a night and four hours off daily for meals and recreation. Two hours a day should be devoted to study and lectures and no more than eight hours to work except at harvest times. Wage incentives were still necessary to encourage "labor enthusiasm," the resolution said, and each commune should aim to produce enough salable commodities to increase money wages.

Fears that communes would go on taking private property—houses, clothing, furniture, and bank deposits—had to be dispelled, the resolution stressed. Communal mess halls must be better run and must avoid repeating the same menu every day. Parents should be allowed to take their children home from the communal nurseries occasionally. As for separating husbands and wives, the Central Committee said: "In building residential quarters, attention must be paid to housing suited to the living together of men and women and the aged and the young of each family."

This official retreat may produce temporary relief for the peasant, but it is worthy of note that the December resolution did not abandon in principle the assault on the family or the military style of living and working. The peasant's day is still thoroughly planned; women remain as much a part of the work force as men, in recognition of the need for a "democratic and united family"; military preparedness remains an integral part of every commune "so as to utterly crush aggressors." The day-long blast of the loudspeaker continues, and Peking considers the "most advanced" communes to be those that most effectively liberate members from household chores and other personal or family concerns.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Sripat Chandrasekhar, Indian social scientist, visited the "commune of the 16 guarantees" when in China recently. In a copyrighted Associated Press dispatch, he said the 16 guarantees covered the provision to members without charge of clothing; food; housing; transportation; maternity benefits; medical aid; old-age care; burial; education; a marriage grant; 12 haircuts a year; 20 hot baths a year; child rearing; recreation; tailoring; electricity.

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### UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE RED CHINESE EXPERIMENT

Precedents exist for virtually every aspect of today's system of communes in Red China. In the city-state of Sparta in ancient Greece an effort was made to wipe out the concept of family. Human labor was exploited to build the pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China. Peking inherited the doctrine of forced labor from Moscow and began to practice it as early as 1950.<sup>5</sup>

Never before, however, has such thoroughgoing regimentation of life been applied on so vast a scale. The numerous past experiments in communal living have been limited mainly to sects opposed to the arbitrary rule of church or state and anxious to abide literally by the concepts of Biblical communism.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese experiment, on the contrary, affects more than half a billion people. Previous essays in communal living have been voluntary undertakings, while peasant membership in China's new "basic social unit" is plainly not a matter of choice.

The confident attitude displayed toward the communes by Peking leaders sharply distinguishes China's move from action taken by the Soviet Union shortly after the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia four decades ago. Anastas I. Mikoyan, First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, told a Los Angeles audience on Jan. 12 that Russia had set up such communes in 1918 and 1919. He said it was soon discovered that they would not work in the absence of a highly productive economy. Mikoyan noted that Marx, Lenin, and other Communist philosophers had recognized that material incentives for workers would be needed until pure communism was attained.

The Russian experiment was not really comparable to what has been taking place in China. In the wake of the Bolshevik take-over in 1917, Lenin and his comrades tried every conceivable device to raise industrial and agricultural output and bring order out of chaotic distribution arrangements. War and revolution had made famine an acute

<sup>5</sup> Nationalist Chinese spokesmen have asserted that the Communists threw 30 million persons into slave labor camps between 1950 and 1952. A professor at the University of South Carolina wrote recently: "Some conservative estimates, based on close reading of the Chinese mainland press, place the number of forced laborers at well over two million."—Richard Louis Walker, *The Continuing Struggle* (1958), pp. 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Groups that have tried to put some form of pure communism into practice in the United States include the Amana Colony, Bethel Community, Bishop Hill Colony, Brook Farm, Harmony Society, Hopedale Community, Oneida Colony, and the Shakers.



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problem, particularly in the cities. For a time the Communists attempted barter of food products for industrial goods, the state acting as middleman. Warren B. Walsh, professor of Russian history at Syracuse University, has described this short-lived effort as "a bow toward the doctrine of a moneyless economy." The basic reason the scheme failed was "the inability to supply manufactured goods in exchange for food." In the circumstances, "The peasants simply declined to do business. . . . They sold their surpluses to individuals or consumed them themselves."<sup>1</sup>

While the Soviet Union's barter scheme was an expedient turned to in a period of weakness, China's commune movement was developed from a position of strength. The Peking government thinks that it has found an "organizational weapon" capable of making China a leading world power. Richard Louis Walker wrote recently: "Statements emanating from Peiping indicate that the leaders there believe they have indeed developed a new dimension of power by turning attention back to the human element of power. They are confident that through their monolithic organization and control over formerly inconsequential masses they have a new basis of superiority. They assert that they intend to exploit it to the fullest in pushing to the final victory."<sup>2</sup>

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### **Steps on Path to Regimented Living**

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CHINA always has been a predominantly agricultural country. A French student of Communist affairs, David Rousset, has pointed out that:

An essential trait of the Chinese Communist revolution—one which of itself suffices to differentiate it profoundly from the Russian Revolution of 1917 and all other Communist revolutions in Europe over the past 40 years—was that, in terms of social classes, it was the peasantry in arms, rather than the proletariat, the intellectuals, or any other group, which played the decisive role in the military victory of 1949 that established Communist rule in China.

Rousset observed that the peasantry remained a key element in the social make-up of the People's Republic of

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Bartlett Walsh, *Russia and the Soviet Union* (1958), pp. 419-420.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

China "not so much by reason of its past revolutionary role as by virtue of its sheer numerical preponderance and vitally important role in the economy."<sup>9</sup> In the last analysis, the peasant is chief supplier of the capital the country needs to become an industrial power.

Establishment of the commune system has caused the third, and apparently final, peasant upheaval for which Peking has been responsible in a decade. From 1950 to 1952, the Communist regime concentrated on a so-called land reform campaign. The Agrarian Reform Law of June 1950 paved the way for forced liquidation of the landlord class.<sup>10</sup> Throughout China rich peasants and landlords were publicly humiliated or executed, and their land, houses, and other properties were seized and redistributed. According to a Nationalist Chinese source, "In two years the Communists confiscated some 63 million acres of land, about 70 per cent of the arable land on mainland China." Division of the land gave "the average farm household . . . about half an acre."<sup>11</sup>

The peasants welcomed the grants of land but became wary as early as 1951, when party functionaries showed up in every village to enroll them in agricultural organizations. Peasant refusal to go along prompted resort to terror tactics in some places and to intensification of propaganda everywhere. When Peking began to experiment with agricultural collectivization late in 1952, peasant resistance grew increasingly stubborn. Rousset has written: "Physically disarmed, the peasants were incapable of outright rebellion, but they resisted by every other means at their disposal: by strikes, by sabotage and acts of violence, and—most disruptive of all—by fleeing in large numbers . . . to the cities."<sup>12</sup>

The party leadership apparently could not decide, all through 1953, how to cope with peasant resistance; the situation was further aggravated by crop failures due to bad weather. The big question was whether to order full-scale collectivization at the cost of inevitable conflict with the peasants or to slow the tempo of industrialization by allowing the peasants to keep a larger share of their out-

<sup>9</sup> David Rousset, "The New Tyranny in the Countryside," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1959, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> See "Land Reform in Asia," *E.R.R.*, 1951 Vol. I, pp. 22-23.

<sup>11</sup> "What Is A Commune?" *Free China Review*, January 1959, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> David Rousset, "The New Tyranny in the Countryside," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1959, p. 6.

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put. The die was cast for the former course late in 1953. The Chinese Communists were about to institute, after four years in power, a program the Soviet Communists had waited 11 years to put into force.<sup>13</sup>

### FORCED COLLECTIVIZATION OF FARMS AFTER 1953

This second reorganization of agriculture was formally set in motion on Dec. 16, 1953, when the government ordered establishment of farm cooperatives throughout the country. Enforcement of the order entailed widespread purges in the army, the party, and state organizations. More than 740,000 cooperatives were eventually set up, each consisting of several hundred families. Some cooperatives permitted shareholders to keep an animal or two and a small vegetable plot, but every peasant was forced to relinquish most of his land, livestock, and farm implements. The cooperatives monopolized selling and buying of all commodities and rationed food to each household.

By 1956, despite two years of tremendous propaganda, the cooperatives had failed to produce expected gains in crop output. Communist officials had to admit that the country lacked machinery and chemicals to enlarge production by application of modern agricultural technology. Meanwhile, peasants continued to stream to the cities and the mammoth bureaucracy that administered the cooperatives was rent by internal dissension. If Peking could not find a method of extracting more work from the peasants, it would have to continue to rely heavily on Soviet aid or let the drive to industrialize China lose momentum.

### LABOR ARMIES, PRECURSORS OF COMMUNES, 1957

Failure of the agricultural cooperatives to get the peasants to produce up to expectations led Peking to experimentation, starting in 1956, with forced labor on a grand scale. It was hoped thereby to achieve great gains in cultivation and construction while continuing to rely heavily on primitive technology. By 1957, methods of organizing the peasants into mass labor armies had been perfected.

Throughout that year and into 1958, masses of peasants were mobilized to work on non-farm projects when farm work slackened—in a Manchurian province 600,000; in Kiangsi 1 million; in Shansi 2.5 million; in Kansu 3.4

<sup>13</sup> See "Collective Farming," *E.R.R.*, 1948 Vol. II, pp. 712-718.

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million; in Hupei 5.5 million; in Honan 10 million; in Shantung 15 million. Members of the labor armies worked at digging canals, dragging rivers, draining swamps, carrying fertile soil onto naked rock, building roads—all in addition to the normal routine of sowing and harvesting.

These pilot ventures in drafting whole regions of people into forced labor armies proved extraordinarily successful and contributed to Peking's enthusiasm for making a "great leap forward" in agricultural production and in industrial production.

Incorporation of the forced labor principle into the fabric of China's social system was put to a test last April with organization of the Sputnik People's Commune, which was followed shortly by formation of other communes. Simultaneously, every student, office worker, and government official was ordered to perform a stint at manual toil. Once it had become clear that production gains in 1958 would outstrip those of 1957 by a wide margin, Peking officially promulgated the new doctrine. Establishment of the commune as China's "basic social unit" on Aug. 29 extended the principle of forced labor to the entire production process.

#### HIGH RATE OF INDUSTRIAL GROWTH IN RED CHINA

The Research Institute of America observed recently that "Western newspapers tend to headline Peiping's problems, but it is important that the West should not be lulled by China's very real difficulties into underestimating the progress and eventual accomplishments" of the Communist regime.<sup>14</sup> William M. Hollister of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimated last year that China's gross national product in 1957 was 86 per cent more than it had been in 1950—an average rate of economic growth of 9.3 per cent a year.<sup>15</sup> Although the high rate resulted in part from the fact that Red China began to advance economically from a very low base, it still represented substantial achievement. No country in the non-Communist world had as high a rate of growth over the same period.

China's industrial output has increased much more than its agricultural output. Yuan-li Wu, director of the Insti-

<sup>14</sup> Research Institute of America, *Communism's New Economic Challenge* (January 1959), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> William M. Hollister, *The Functioning of the Chinese Economy* (1958), p. 2.

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tute of Asian Studies at Marquette University, recently calculated from official Communist Chinese statistics that agricultural production rose 24.7 per cent from 1952 through 1957, the period of China's first Five-Year Plan. Total industrial output climbed 118 per cent during that period, and factory production 132.5 per cent. Moreover, according to Wu, although only 85 per cent more consumer goods were turned out in 1957 than in 1952, output of producer goods, including capital equipment, was up 204 per cent over 1952.<sup>16</sup>

These enormous increases in industrial output have been made possible in part by more efficient utilization of existing facilities. Mainly, however, they have been due to Communist China's deliberate policy of investing in capital construction every penny that could be squeezed out of the peasantry or obtained from the Soviet Union. Wu quoted a Chinese Communist source to the effect that total fixed industrial assets in China had been "virtually doubled" in comparison with pre-Five Year Plan levels. Hollister estimated that the proportion of Communist China's gross national product invested in plant and equipment rose steadily each year from 9.6 per cent in 1950 to 24.9 per cent in 1957.<sup>17</sup>

An increase in the rate of investment from 19 per cent in 1956 to nearly 25 per cent in 1957 helps to explain the sharp increase in industrial production in 1958. The State Statistical Bureau of the People's Republic of China estimated on Dec. 31, 1958, that total industrial production had climbed 60 per cent from the level of only a year earlier. Output of coal and steel had doubled, and output of machine tools tripled. Work of the mass labor armies on projects of a capital nature contributed to these results. Subsequent organization of the communes may lead to equally spectacular accomplishments in agriculture and to additional gains in industrial output. Current goals, for example, call for raising steel production from the 11 million tons turned out in 1958 to 18 million tons this year, and coal production from 270 million tons in 1958 to 380 million tons in 1959.

<sup>16</sup> Like most non-Communist scholars who have studied Red China's official statistics, Wu questions their accuracy. But he cautions that "The rising trend of industrial production and particularly of modern industry and heavy industry should not be ignored."—Yuan-li Wu, "China's Industry in Peace and War," *Current History*, December 1958, pp. 327-329.

<sup>17</sup> William M. Hollister, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133.

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## Communes and Sino-Soviet Relations

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ESTABLISHMENT of the communes tended to confirm a view long held by experts that Red China was determined to reduce its economic dependence on the Soviet Union. Soviet aid to China through 1958 is believed to have totaled about \$2.5 billion. In the past three or four years, however, Peking has been trying to liquidate past indebtedness. In every year since 1955, China has sent to Russia more than it has received from Russia. Exports to the Soviet Union in 1957 totaled \$750 million—nearly half in agricultural commodities; imports from the Soviet Union in the same year totaled \$550 million—half in machinery and industrial goods. China's export surplus with Soviet Russia was even larger in 1958; products valued at \$900 million were shipped to the Soviet Union, while goods to the value of only \$600 million were imported from that country.

The impression that Communist China is determined to avoid becoming unduly obligated to the Soviet Union in future has been further strengthened by a technical aid pact signed in Moscow, Feb. 7, by Premier Khrushchev and Premier Chou En-lai. Russia agreed to supply \$1.25 billion in equipment and assistance by 1967 for construction of 78 heavy industrial installations in China. This sum is to be paid back in full through shipment of agricultural commodities and raw materials—products whose output is being increased under the commune system.

### EVIDENCES OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE RED GIANTS

Russia and China, like the major Western partners, share a community of interest that outweighs their conflicts of interest. Communist China, while still needing Russia's help in expanding its military and industrial strength, seeks to reduce that dependence as rapidly as possible; the Soviet Union, while rejoicing in alliance with a great Asian power, does not want that ally to become too powerful.

Red China is passing through a phase in which it must maintain a "beleaguered fortress" atmosphere in order to exact exceptional effort from its people. The Soviet Union needed such an atmosphere in earlier years, but now is trying to get away from perpetual war hysteria. Peking is believed to have initiated last year's program of bombard-

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ing Quemoy without Russian prompting and perhaps over Russian opposition. The Chinese people were told when the shelling started, Aug. 24, that Chiang's forces were about to invade the mainland and five days later the order for mobilization of the entire peasantry into communes was handed down.

Sources of friction have produced differences of opinion between Peking and Moscow before,<sup>18</sup> but now, as Richard Lowenthal put it recently: "For the first time in the history of the alliance, there is . . . clear evidence that Soviet policies toward the non-Communist world . . . in both European and world-wide affairs . . . have been modified by the impact of Chinese pressure."<sup>19</sup> There were strong suspicions last year, for example, that objections from Peking caused Moscow to withdraw \$270 million in promised credits to Yugoslavia in May, and to retreat in August from an agreement to discuss the Middle East crisis at a special "summit session" of the U.N. Security Council. There were indications also that the Kremlin might have been more cooperative in the negotiations, still going on, for a nuclear test ban if Red China had not made known last spring its intention to become a nuclear power.

The most unmistakable sign that China had become a more independent partner in the Russo-Chinese alliance was its decision to strike out on its own, ideologically. While mainland papers were filled with praise for the communes all during the autumn of 1958, the Soviet press and radio gave the movement little notice. The *Literary Gazette*, circulated among the Soviet hierarchy and intellectuals, ignored the communes until Sept. 30, when it published a color story without mentioning that communes were a radical ideological innovation. *Izvestia* waited more than a month to reprint the official Chinese order setting up the communes. When it did so, the word "communism" in the concluding paragraph—"It now appears that the establishment of communism in our country is no longer a remote future event"—was changed to "communes."

Soviet officialdom cold-shouldered or ridiculed China's bold step in numerous ways. Without alluding to the communes, Soviet journals ran long articles on the technological basis

<sup>18</sup> See "Chinese-Soviet Relations," *E.R.R.*, 1952 Vol. I, pp. 219-220.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Lowenthal, "Shifts and Rifts in the Russo-Chinese Alliance," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1959, p. 14.



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of pure communism, stressing the importance of utilizing machinery to increase the productivity of the individual. Premier Khrushchev told Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), Dec. 1, that the communes were "reactionary," though on Feb. 5 he denied that he had made that statement.

#### ROLE OF COMMUNE IN IDEOLOGY OF COMMUNISM

Decisions by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party at its sixth plenary session, Nov. 28 to Dec. 10, 1958, helped to heal the apparent rift with Soviet Russia—at least for the time being. Marked concessions to the Soviet point of view were made on various matters on which China and Russia had not seen eye to eye. Most important, the Central Committee acknowledged that the commune was not in itself a short-cut to communism. Premier Chou En-lai reiterated the more modest expectations of gains under the system when he told the Twenty-First Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Jan. 23, that his party intended "to build China into a socialist country with a highly developed modern industry, agriculture, science, and culture in 15 or 20 years or a bit longer."

Two days before the new technical aid pact with the Soviet Union was signed on Feb. 5, the Chinese Communist Party unequivocally recognized the ideological leadership of the Soviet party. An editorial in the *People's Daily* of Peking, official organ of the Chinese party, said that the "victorious road taken by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union will enormously enrich the theories of Marxism-Leninism and become a brilliant example for all socialist countries." After saying that "We in the Chinese Communist Party will persist in the struggle to learn from the great Communist Party of the Soviet Union," the editorial quoted Khrushchev's statement at the party congress in Moscow that Communists "cannot hurriedly and rashly carry out what is immature as this will distort and undermine our cause."

Premier Khrushchev's policies and views were given added endorsement on Feb. 16 by *Red Flag*, the most important ideological journal of Chinese communism. A long article praised his statement at the party congress that efforts to achieve communism must follow a historic course, no part of which could be skipped at will. The article acknowledged Soviet ideological leadership by calling the Moscow meeting "a new milestone in mankind's march



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toward communism" and saying that "It declared to the world that the Soviet Union has already entered a period of all-out building of communism."

#### CHINESE RETENTION OF OWN ROAD TO COMMUNISM

The resolution adopted by the Chinese Communists in December cleared the way for retreat on two fronts—practically, before the Chinese peasants; ideologically, before Soviet criticism. Experts think the most significant feature of the December resolution, however, was not the bowing to realities of the moment, but Red China's insistence that the commune would be the instrument for achievement of socialism and then communism. Peking's stand indicates not only that the commune will be on the world scene for some time but also that China and Russia will be following quite different paths; the Soviet Union has discussed only in vaguest terms how it will accomplish the transition from socialism to communism.

Communist-bloc countries have long acknowledged that the Soviet Union is the only country that has achieved socialism and started moving toward the final stage—communism. In Marxist terms, Russia has reached the third of four stages in the march toward perfection, while other Communist countries have progressed only to some point in the second stage. The four stages are 1) capitalism; 2) building socialism from pre-socialism through the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) socialism; 4) communism.

Communist China has conceded from the outset of the commune drive that it is still in the stage of building socialism. The party resolution that formally launched the communes, Aug. 29, 1958, said that "our task at the present stage is the building of socialism," but that "It appears now that the realization of communism in our country is no longer a thing of the distant future." By establishing communes, the resolution predicted, it would be possible to arrive at the stage of socialism in most of the country within three to six years.

The ideological significance of the December retreat was twofold. First, attainment of socialism was put off until "15, 20 or more years," and pure communism was not to be achieved for "very much longer." Second, the resolution defended the commune approach to Marx's utopia by adhering with elaborate care to traditional Marxist argument.

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Communist leaders were cautioned that the transition to socialism cannot be achieved "by mere wishful thinking" but is determined "by objective factors—the level of the development of production and the level of the people's political understanding."

The resolution recognized that the "present level of the productive forces in our country . . . is still very low." It called the commune "the best form" for achieving the "socialist principle" of "from each according to his ability—to each according to his work," because it was capable of "developing the productive forces at high speed . . . by bringing labor power and means of production under unified management and development on a larger scale."

The resolution admitted that the final stage—pure communism in a classless society—depended on an "abundance" of material goods, so that everyone could have as much of anything as he thought he needed. The commune would also be "the best form" for achieving the "communist principle" of "from each according to his ability—to each according to his needs." Certain features of pure communism were present in the commune in embryonic form. With expansion of the "forces of production" through the device of the people's commune, "the communist factors are bound to increase gradually and these will lay the foundation both in material and spiritual conditions for the transition from socialism to communism."

The Chinese have now set out to strengthen the commune by concentrating attention on practical problems. Peking decreed in January that only the most efficient of the thousands of "backyard blast furnaces" set up last year should be retained and the others enlarged or abandoned.<sup>20</sup> Establishment of nurseries and boarding schools has been picking up since the turn of the year despite widespread parental misgivings. This has freed women for other tasks and made it easier to mobilize children for work.<sup>21</sup> Millions of students, professors, clerks, and officials began signing up or setting out in February for this year's factory, mine or farm stint; they will be required to put in a month or

<sup>20</sup> A major reason for this backtracking, Peking indicated, was the enormous strain put on the country's transportation and distribution system. Inadequate transportation was partly responsible for urban shortages of many items, including food, and for a sharp slump in exports.

<sup>21</sup> The December resolution suggested that school children from the age of nine upward perform regular work and that youngsters aged seven and eight be assigned to light "subsidiary" tasks.

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more of physical labor alongside those who earn their livelihood at manual toil.

### FUTURE PITFALLS FOR PEKING-MOSCOW RELATIONS

Peking's endeavors to perfect China's "organizational weapon" may foreshadow trouble with Moscow as Red China presses its claim to spearhead Communist drives into other parts of Asia. China may have found in the commune a unique vehicle for traveling the road to communism, especially suitable for overpopulated and underdeveloped countries where unskilled labor is plentiful. Communist propagandists have been hard at work in every Asian land dramatizing Red China's economic gains. China's growth rate climbed to three times that of India in 1958, in part because of the mobilization of Chinese peasants into communes.

Despite shortages at home, Communist China has started its own program of foreign aid. Countries that have recently received grants, loans, or credits from Peking include Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Indonesia, and Nepal. Peking has been waging a vigorous campaign to win the backing of more than ten million Chinese residing in Southeast Asian countries.<sup>22</sup> In Thailand and Burma the takeover of government control by army generals last autumn was said to have been engineered in part to meet dangers threatened by Communist troublemaking.<sup>23</sup>

Whether or not the Sino-Soviet alliance can endure a challenge of the powerful senior partner by the rising junior partner is a question to which the answer must be deferred. Peking and Moscow may well run into new and sharper rifts as China continues to gain strength and to press its views on the strategy and tactics of international communism. The Chinese ideological journal, *Red Flag*, said on Feb. 16 that the Twenty-First Soviet Party Congress had "shattered the designs of imperialist reactionaries . . . to sow discord and undermine Sino-Soviet relations of friendship and cooperation." It added that no force on earth "can tear this unity asunder."

However, it was probably not by accident that the Soviet

<sup>22</sup> See "Overseas Chinese," *E.R.R.*, 1958 Vol. II, pp. 798-800. An Associated Press dispatch from Hong Kong, March 11, indicated that the campaign was unsuccessful. Establishment of communes was said to have brought a sharp decline in the customary remittances from overseas Chinese to relatives in China.

<sup>23</sup> See "Revolutionary Ferment and Democratic Processes," *E.R.R.*, 1959 Vol. I, pp. 90-92.

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Union assigned highest priority in its new Seven-Year Plan to populating and industrializing the Soviet Far East. The spread of Russian influence that resulted from World War II has been seriously undermined only along the border with China. In 15 years Red China has virtually reclaimed from Stalin's empire North Korea, Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, and Sinkiang, and it has gained equal footing in Outer Mongolia. The Soviet Far East, north of China, is a sparsely populated territory of tremendous extent whose rich untapped resources of raw materials make an attractive field for future Chinese expansion.

Adlai Stevenson reported, Oct. 2, 1958, that when he commented in Russia to Soviet officials that China would have 1.6 billion people by the year 2000, a frequent response was that this was an additional reason for Soviet-American friendship. But Stevenson warned: "It would be a very great mistake to underestimate the present solidarity of the Soviet Union and China. . . . They may fight like cats and dogs with each other, but as to the outside world their unity is formidable." He concluded that "Any idea that the Soviet Union and China . . . can be divided is dangerous fantasy, at least for the present."<sup>24</sup>

The Research Institute of America has observed that "perhaps the most important" source of friction between Russia and China is "the potential ideological rivalry between the two 'holy cities' of Communism." The "key fact" in their relationship last year was "that the effort to seize Communist ideological leadership was made by the Chinese."<sup>25</sup> Creation of the commune system may at one and the same time hasten the growth of over-all Communist power and hasten the occasion for a Russo-Chinese showdown.

<sup>24</sup> Copyrighted article for North American Newspaper Alliance, *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1958.

<sup>25</sup> Research Institute of America, *Communism's New Economic Challenge* (January 1959), p. 23.

